

Agreement Reached with Forever 21

December 2004

Forever 21, Inc., the Garment Worker Center, Sweatshop Watch, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, on behalf of several Los Angeles garment workers represented by it, have reached an agreement to resolve all litigation between them. In addition, the parties have agreed to take steps to promote greater worker protection in the local garment industry. The parties are pleased to announce the resolution of this matter as a positive and symbolic step forward in demonstrating respect and appreciation for garment workers. Under the parties' agreement, the national boycott of Forever 21 and related protests at the Company's retail stores, initiated by the Garment Worker Center in 2001, have ended. The parties share a belief that garment workers should labor in lawful conditions and should be treated fairly and with dignity. Forever 21, the Garment Worker Center and Sweatshop Watch all remain committed to ensuring that the clothing Forever 21 sells in its stores is made under lawful conditions.



SWEATSHOP

WATCH

Connecting you to
worker struggles in the
garment industry!

December 2003 Vol. 9, No. 4

The Year in Review: Significant Victories for Sweatshop Workers, but the Struggles Continue

Looking back at the year, it's inspiring to review the many victories that sweatshop workers have won. Courageous workers from New York, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Thailand, Sri Lanka and elsewhere have stood up for their rights—often campaigning for several years—and have finally won justice. In many cases, the workers' struggles were supported by international solidarity campaigns. The letters, faxes, emails or phone calls that you made to companies or governments on behalf of workers made a difference. Meanwhile, brave workers from Los Angeles, Mexico and many other places continue to fight for dignity. And in some cases, giant companies not only deny responsibility for sweatshop conditions, but also attack the organizations seeking to end sweatshop abuses. Now, more than ever, it's important to continue your support of workers' struggles. Write a letter, join a protest, make a donation. When thousands of people act together to support workers' rights, it makes a difference. Here are just some of the year's highlights.

Big Victories in 2003

In New York, DKNY Workers Win Settlement, But Continue Boycott. In 1998, DKNY workers sewing the



Workers in Los Angeles marched to honor International Workers Day on May 1, 2003. Photo by Lin-Shao Chin.

upscale Donna Karan label, spoke out against long work hours, lack of overtime pay and locked bathrooms. DKNY closed the factory, fired most of the workers and moved to another location a few blocks away. Then, the Chinese and Latina women workers organized a boycott campaign. They also filed a lawsuit against the company for wage violations and discrimination, citing that Latina workers faced lower wages and harassment. In 2001, more workers joined the campaign and filed a class action lawsuit for wage violations against DKNY and its factories. This year, DKNY entered a settlement with the workers in both the discrimination case against the Latinas and the class action lawsuit for wage violations. Under the settlement, workers in these two cases received almost \$1 million but no apology. Unfortunately, DKNY has also pulled its

production out of New York and moved to where worker organizing is relatively weak. The workers urge people to continue to boycott DKNY garments until DKNY brings back the work to New York, corrects all of its wrongdoing and rehires the unjustly fired workers. To get involved, contact the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops at www.nmass.org or 718-625-9091.

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Los Angeles Community Groups Create Innovative Workforce Development Models

As jobs in apparel manufacturing continue to decline in Los Angeles and across the nation due to the pressures of globalization, Sweatshop Watch is exploring new models to help dislocated garment workers.

One example of a workforce development community model in Los Angeles is the **Metropolitan Alliance's Jobs and Health Care Campaign**. The Metropolitan Alliance launched this campaign in February 2000 to create training opportunities and new jobs in the healthcare industry. The goal of this campaign is not only to build a training infrastructure to funnel poor and working-class people into healthcare jobs, but also to create new jobs to expand desperately needed health services. In May 2002 the Alliance won funding from the Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board to establish the Health Care Careers Training Program which will train and place a total of 250 participants in health care jobs in the first year — 150 from poor and working class communities and 100 incumbent workers who will open up existing job positions with participating employers. Currently, the program is in the first step of the process to screen and select participants for the training program from the membership of the Metropolitan Alliance.

Another example of a successful economic development/workforce investment model in Los Angeles is the **Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice (FCCEJ)**. A project of **Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE)** since 1999, the FCCEJ has become a people-based counterpoint to the real estate focused economic development strategies that have dominated the Figueroa Corridor community near Downtown Los Angeles for the past thirty years. In June 2001, FCCEJ won an unprecedented package of benefits from the developers of a massive hotel and entertainment complex near the Staples Center in return for a promise by the coalition members to support the project. The developers agreed to build affordable housing and parks, hire locally and pay living wages. Currently, FCCEJ is in the process of creating a job training and job placement program to enable local residents, the majority of whom are garment workers, to have access to these living wage jobs that will be created by the development.

We look forward to working with organizations like the Metropolitan Alliance and SAJE as we work to create job training and job placement opportunities that address the significant legal, cultural, language and educational barriers that dislocated garment workers face today in accessing existing workforce development programs. What seems to be a formidable challenge for garment worker advocates can also be a great opportunity to help a significant group of immigrant working families lift themselves out of poverty.



Job training class in session at SAJE.
Photo courtesy of SAJE, 2003.

Policy Update

The Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act

The 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is up for reauthorization this year. A bill that passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee includes many provisions that address the needs of Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations in receiving job training. "The Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2003," or S. 1627, came as a result of bi-partisan negotiations, and replaced an earlier bill S. 1543. Key provisions include expanding the purpose of the Workforce Investment Act to:

- provide English acquisition as one of the skills in job training,
- require states to develop a plan on how they will serve hard-to-serve populations, and
- create an "integrated training program" that combines occupational skills training with language acquisition.

Sponsored by Senator Mike Enzi (WY) and co-sponsored by Senators Judd George (NH), Edward Kennedy (MA) and Patty Murray (WA), S. 1627 passed the Senate on November 14, 2003. For more information, visit the National Immigration Law Center at www.nilc.org/immsemplymnt/wrkfrc_dev/index.htm.

The closures of Levi's last North American factories mark an end of an era in U.S. garment manufacturing, and deal a brutal reality to the last Levi's workers who are also union members. "We're never going to find a place like this," Maria Hernandez, who worked for Levi's 26 years, told the San Antonio Express-News. Indeed, few jobs exist, and most are in low-paying service industries. Meanwhile, Levi's CEO Philip Marineau's \$22.5 million paycheck this year adds insult to the workers it is leaving behind.

Viola Casares empathizes with these workers. She worked for Levi's at its Zarzamora Street plant in San Antonio and remembers the shock of the plant's unexpected closure back in 1990. Since then, she co-founded a community group Fuerza Unida, a united force in fighting for economic justice for San Antonio's workers.

Levi's Closes: Greed Triumphs Once Again

by Viola Casares

The last Levi's plant is closing in San Antonio. I worked at the plant on Zarzamora Street that closed in 1990. Before that the company had closed 58 plants between 1981 and 1990, and it put 10,400 people out of work. The Levi's representatives said they had to close to "stay competitive," but they're not losing money, they are making money. In 1989 they gave us a Miracle Worker award for our hard, committed work resulting in "record sales, record earnings and better-than-ever clothing products." But, they are greedy and want even more money. These are the profits for the last two years.

- 2002 gross profit—\$1,685 million
- 2003 third-quarter gross profit — \$404 million

As soon as we found out the last Levi's plant was closing, we set a community meeting to give a voice to the workers, so they could share their stories, their ideas and decide if they wanted to organize. We made flyers to pass out to the workers, and a group of about ten Fuerza Unida members met at 6:00 a.m. to distribute the flyers when they were coming into work. They were afraid to take the flyers at first because the guards at the gate were waving them in to not stop. The guards said that we would be "impeding traffic" and there could be an accident. After the first few cars started taking the flyers, most of those who followed would also stop to take one. But the guards still were making it hard for us to distribute the flyers. One of the members of Fuerza Unida had a cell phone, so we called a television station to report this. The guards overheard the call so the managers came out and allowed us to come closer to the gate to stop the cars and give out the flyers. They said they were happy to work with us, but very few workers showed up for the community meeting, and several women called us to tell us that they were forbidden to speak with us. Another reason for the low attendance is that the *mujeres* of Levi's did not want to speak with the *mujeres* from Fuerza Unida yet because the union (Unite) was still negotiating their severance package.

Through a reliable source, we know the morale of the women is low and they are concerned about how they are going to pay their mortgage, bills, or cars. Many are worried about finding new jobs after dedicating so many years to Levi's. Who will hire these women with skills limited to sewing? All the corporations are going to other countries. There aren't any more companies hiring workers in the U.S. much less in San Antonio.

In 1990, Levi's moved to Costa Rica, but when the workers organized for better wages and working conditions, the company reportedly moved to South Africa. Levi's claims that they are being responsible to their workers by offering them severance packages and job training, but where are the jobs? These companies put up the all-

American face of patriotism but in reality they are cutting our throats by taking all those highly-needed jobs to another country. Once again, they wash their hands with the U.S. then drop us the few dollars they used to dry them. Fuerza Unida does not want to deny jobs for workers in other countries, but these companies move to other countries because they have weak labor and environmental laws. They won't be fair to the workers if they are not forced to be.



Displaced workers protest in front of Levi's headquarters, 1999. Photo courtesy of Fuerza Unida.

The majority of the plant workers are women. I feel for the workers because I know how they are feeling. We went through the same thing in 1990. Maybe it's a different feeling because they know the plant is going to close, and we didn't have any warning. But knowing doesn't make things any easier for them. With Thanksgiving and Christmas so close, it's hard to know that you're not going to have a job.

Fuerza Unida has held this struggle for worker's rights for thirteen years, and I've been here since the beginning. The closing of the Levi's plant is like one of your family members dying. Someone asked me in an interview if I had respect for the Levi's Corporation and I answered "Why should I have respect for Levi's when they don't have respect for workers' rights."

Victories & Struggles continued from page 1...

In Dominican Republic, BJ&B Hat Factory Workers Win Union Contract. After six years of attempts at unionizing and winning a contract, workers of the Sindicato Unido de Trabajadores (SUT), the union at the BJ&B hat factory, signed a collective bargaining agreement. It includes the protection of the right to organize, a 10% wage increase, scholarships, the protection of pregnant workers and additional social programs. It is the first contract to be signed in a free trade zone in the Dominican Republic to exceed government minimums, and SUT may be the largest union with a collective bargaining agreement in a free trade zone in the world. The factory makes hats for colleges and universities, as well as major sports franchises.

In Guatemala, Choi & Shin Factory Workers Win Contract. Workers at the two Choi & Shin factories signed the only collective bargaining agreement in Guatemala. The factories produce for Liz Claiborne and Talbots. The agreement marks a tremendous victory for the unions who struggled for two years. The agreement includes wage increases and improved access to health care services and day care facilities.

In Thailand, Gina Form Bra Factory Workers Win Contract. Workers at the Gina Form bra factory in Bangkok, Thailand won a settlement and new collective bargaining agreement, ending a two-year struggle marked with intense union-busting. The factory produces for the Gap, Victoria's Secret and Kmart. The workers' victory includes recognition of their union by the factory, reinstatement of 38 workers fired over a year ago and an end to court actions seeking to fire 5 union leaders, as well as a new union contract providing monetary benefits.

In Sri Lanka, Jaqalanka Workers Win Agreement. The Free Trade Zones Workers Union (FTZWU) and Jaqalanka Ltd. reached an agreement to the long running dispute at the Jaqalanka factory in Sri Lanka. Most of the union's demands have been met and Jaqalanka has agreed to recognize the FTZWU as the representative of the workers and will refrain from any victimization or harassment of union members. The factory sewed for Nike and Vanity Fair, among others.

New Anti-Sweatshop Laws

On the legislative front, there were a number of successes too. The U.S. Congress passed the **Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003**, which bans imports from Burma, a country ruled by a brutal military regime. The California legislature passed **Senate Bill 578, No Sweatshop Labor in Public Contracts**. The bill prohibits the use of sweatshop labor in the procurement or laundering of apparel, garments and corresponding accessories, equipment or supplies by state agencies.

The Grinches of 2003

Forever 21. Dozens of Los Angeles workers who sewed the trendy label Forever 21 are continuing their 2-year old boycott with regular protests at Forever 21 stores. The Latino immigrant workers endured wages below the legal minimum, no overtime pay, unsanitary and dangerous conditions and harassment. They are demanding that Forever 21 end its practice of using and promoting exploitative working conditions in the garment industry. Not only is Forever 21 denying responsibility for sweatshop conditions, it also sued the organizations who are helping the workers including the Garment Worker Center and Sweatshop Watch. Forever 21 is charging the organizations and some of their staff members with libel and slander, but the advocates maintain that they have only been asserting their free speech rights and call the lawsuit an attempt to silence them and the workers' boycott. To get involved in the Forever 21 Boycott, contact the Garment Worker Center at www.garmentworkercenter.org or 213-748-5866.



Tarrant workers protest in the streets of Puebla, Mexico.
Photo courtesy of the CAT, 2003.

Tarrant Apparel Group, Federated Department Stores, The Wet Seal Co., Tommy Hilfiger. In the state of Puebla, Mexico, 800 garment workers at the Tarrant México - Ajalpan jeans factory are seeking recognition of their independent union, SUITTAR (Sindicato Único Independiente de Trabajadores de la Empresa Tarrant México), as well as reinstatement of over 400! workers illegally dismissed from the factory. Tarrant Apparel Group and its affiliates have failed to respect Mexican law, recognize the independent union or respond to the labor crisis. Its major clients include Federated Department Stores (Macy's, Bloomingdales), The Wet Seal Co. and Tommy Hilfiger. Support the workers' campaign by telling these retailers to respect workers' rights. More information at www.sweatshopwatch.org.

Gildan Activewear. Last year, a Canadian TV program aired an exposé on the Canadian t-shirt manufacturer Gildan Activewear, alleging forced pregnancy testing and other violations of workers' rights at its Honduran factories. The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) and the Honduran Independent Monitoring Team documented the company's labor practices and working conditions in wholly owned and contract sewing facilities in Central America and Mexico. The groups co-authored a report on their findings, titled "A Canadian Success Story? Gildan Activewear: T-shirts, Free Trade and Worker Rights," which also reveals how trade agreements are reshaping Gildan's business strategy and production network. Gildan is attempting to discredit and suppress the report and is also threatening legal action against MSN. However, several respected academics have attested to the report's credibility and the quality of the research carried out by the Honduran Independent Monitoring Team. Gildan should address the labor issues documented in the report and stop its campaign, including threats of legal action, against MSN. More information at www.maquilasolidarity.org/campaigns/gildan/index.htm.

Bebe. In 2001, the women's clothing retailer bebe was caught using sweatshop labor in the production of its garments in Los Angeles. Within a six month span, twelve Chinese immigrant garment workers filed two separate lawsuits against the clothing company for unpaid minimum wages and overtime pay, harassment and retaliatory firing. Join the workers in telling bebe to stop using sweatshops. Contact Sweatshop Watch at www.sweatshopwatch.org/bebe or 213-748-5945.

Time Will Tell

Sean John. In late October, a bold 19-year-old garment worker charged hip-hop artist Sean "P. Diddy" Combs with using a sweatshop in Honduras to make tens of thousands

of shirts for his Sean John clothing line. The young worker, Lydda Eli Gonzalez, said she and 13 co-workers were fired for trying to organize a union, that women are fired if they are pregnant, that they are forced to work overtime and that they are limited to only two bathroom breaks a day. Sean Combs told the press, "I want to make sure that any merchandise that has my name on it is made by workers who are treated well."

We'll see if Mr. Combs does the right thing and addresses the labor abuses. For more information, contact the National Labor Committee at www.nlcnet.org/campaigns/setisa or 212-242-3002.

A Growing Movement

The WTO Collapses. In September, the movement for fair trade witnessed a ray of hope as developing nations demonstrated a united front and stalled the 5th meeting of the World Trade Organization in Cancún, Mexico. Twenty-one developing nations walked out of the meeting when the U.S. and European Union refused to concede on agricultural subsidies that hurt poorer nations. Now, there is an opening to push for alternative economic agreements that will truly benefit the world's poorest countries.

Musicians Against Sweatshops.

MASS is a new initiative of musicians and fans who are intent on driving sweatshops out of the music merchandising business and empowering garment workers around the world to resist exploitative working conditions. The fashion industry listens to the youth. The youth listens to the music. Together, fans and musicians can make sweatshops so unfashionable as to make them unfeasible. Step one is to clean up the music merchandising business. MASS members are doing this by sourcing all of their merchandise from union shops or worker owned cooperatives. To learn more about MASS and how to participate, visit www.nosweatshop.org.



Poster created by BJ&B Union reads, "I am Jenny of Plant #1, and these are my children. For their future, I support the union, and you should, too. Affiliate!"



Holiday Alternatives



Santa's Nice List

His Naughty and nice list doesn't just include well-behaved or bisbehaved children anymore. Santa has caught up with the times! Even Santa sees that companies have a choice. Employers can either treat

workers with dignity by paying respectable wages, or they can exploit the labor of employees and create a hazardous and uncomfortable work environment for them.

As you complete your holiday shopping, remember that the following companies have demonstrated a commitment to improve the wages and working conditions of their employees. Shop with a conscience this holiday season. Help Santa and Sweatshop Watch by supporting these union shops, worker cooperatives and fair trade products.

Sweatshop Watch Gifts

Be among the first to sport Sweatshop Watch's hip t-shirt or new totebag. The shirts are union-made and the totes are from Fuerza Unida, a women's sewing cooperative. Both are \$20, plus shipping. See www.sweatshopwatch.org for ordering details.

No Sweat Apparel



A 100% union-made alternative. No sweat is attempting to change the garment industry by offering workers a living wage and decent working conditions. Find t-shirts, athletic wear, sweats, jackets and baseball caps at www.nosweatshop.com or pick up the phone and dial 1 (877) 992-7829.

Global Exchange

Features unique gifts from around the world as well as educational resources about human rights issues. Artisans create each of the Fair Trade crafts using designs passed down for centuries. Check out www.store.globalexchange.org.

Fair Trade Federation

An association of wholesalers, retailers and producers

whose members are committed to providing fair wages and good employment opportunities to economically disadvantaged workers and farmers worldwide. Look at the FTF website at www.fairtradefederation.org.

Maggie's Organics

One of the few companies in the apparel industry that offers 100% organic clothing. They have created a very unique commitment to a women's sewing cooperative in Nicaragua to ensure fair labor standards are met. Contact them at www.organicclothes.com or 1 (800) 609-8593.

Powell's Books

A legendary independent bookstore with an all union workforce in Portland, Oregon. The inventory is expansive and their website can handle orders from across the nation. Visit www.powells.com.

Fuerza Unida

The former Levi's workers in San Antonio, Texas formed a unique women's sewing cooperative that makes and silkscreen t-shirts, canvas bags and flags. Call (210) 927-2294 to make your orders today.

Market Place India

A non-profit organization that sells products made by women artisans in India. It began with low-income women who chose to make handmade textiles as a means to provide women with employment in Mumbai, India. To order a catalog call 1 (800) 736-8905 or order online at www.marketplaceindia.org.

Diamond Cut Jeans

The last union-made jeans company in the United States. Get top quality denim jeans for men, women, and children. Visit their website: www.diamondcutjeans.com or call their customer service line at 1 (877) 448-7738.

Sweat X

Help support one of the only union cut and sew shops in Los Angeles. Sweat X opened in 2002. They make t-shirts, shorts, headwear and other fashionable garments. Order at www.sweatx.net or 1 (866) 4-SWEATX.

Please visit our website at www.sweatshopwatch.org to find out what else you can do to put an end to sweatshops this holiday season.

Express Yourself

Poetry Section

Borders change like shifting sands
at the whims of a king.

And peoples move like air
though no fault of their own.

We watch and listen wondering why
this is how it must be (if we're human)
Why? but never question the value of a person

We ask the question and soon forget
Due to the ripples in the air
The value of their labor is never known,
Due the waves in the air
We never ask the questions of this radiating
energy,

Nor question the masters, for we are the
servants.

By Donald Ellis

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Sweatshop Watch's newsletter is published quarterly.
Membership dues, which include a subscription, are
\$20.

Commentaries, articles and letters are welcome and
should be accompanied with your name, address and
telephone or email.

Resources

• **No Sweatshops: Information & Action Kit** is a new resource from Sweatshop Watch, available in January 2004. The kit, which is geared towards students, teachers, consumers and activists, includes over a dozen factsheets on sweatshops, campaign materials and a CD with a preview of the *Made in L.A.* documentary film. \$10 each plus shipping. Order at www.sweatshopwatch.org or 510-834-8990.

The Kit features informative factsheets on:

What is a Sweatshop?
Sweatshops in Our Backyard!
Global Sweatshops
Sweatshops & Globalization's "Race to the Bottom"
Fighting for Global Justice
Human Need Over Corporate Greed
Immigrant Rights Are Human Rights!
Environmental Impacts of Sweatshops
Sweatshop Labor and Women
Successes in the Struggle to End Sweatshops!
Frequently Asked Questions
Current Campaigns/Alternatives
What can you do!
And more...

• **How to Become a No Sweat City** and **How to Become a No Sweat School** are two new publications from the Maquila Solidarity Network in Canada. These guides offer practical advice on how to win and enforce municipal and school board anti-sweatshop purchasing policies. Available at www.maquilasolidarity.org/nosweat.

• Sweatshop Watch launched a new **information clearinghouse on Globalization and the Apparel Industry** at www.sweatshopwatch.org/global. The web site contains reports and news articles on free trade, workforce development and other topics, including a Sweatshop Watch working paper, titled "**Free Trade's Looming Threat to the World's Garment Workers**" and a report by Professor Richard Appelbaum, titled "**Assessing the Impact of the Phasing-out of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing on Apparel Exports on the Least Developed and Developing Countries.**"

• **Threads : Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry** is a new book by Jane L. Collins, which puts a human face on globalization. *Threads* shows not only how international trade affects local communities but also how workers can organize in this new environment to more effectively demand better treatment from their distant corporate employers. University of Chicago Press, 2003, www.press.uchicago.edu.

How To Give To Sweatshop Watch

Every gift to Sweatshop Watch goes a long way in protecting the rights of garment workers. Here are some ways to donate:

- Write a check and send it to our Oakland office.
- Make a donation with your credit card by visiting our web site www.sweatshopwatch.org.
- Buy a Sweatshop Watch sweat-free tee.
- Ask your employer to match your gift.
- Give your time as a volunteer.
- Make a gift of goods or services.
- Designate Sweatshop Watch in a planned gift (will or trust).
- If you are a federal government employee, you can make a gift through your workplace. Sweatshop Watch is a member of the Human & Civil Rights Organizations of America, Combined Federal Campaign - Member 2235.

Sweatshop Watch is a nonprofit public charity, registered under IRS Code 501(c)3. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

www.sweatshopwatch.org



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Join Sweatshop Watch!

Founded in 1995, Sweatshop Watch is a coalition of over 30 organizations, and many individuals, committed to eliminating the exploitation that occurs in sweatshops. Sweatshop Watch serves low-wage workers nationally and globally, with a focus on garment workers in California. We believe that workers should earn a living wage in a safe, decent work environment, and that those responsible for the exploitation of sweatshop workers must be held accountable. Please join us by becoming a member. Either send in this form with a check or make a contribution from our website www.sweatshopwatch.org with your credit card.

Total Enclosed: ☐ \$20 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ Other \$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Make checks payable and send to: SWEATSHOP WATCH, 310 Eighth St., Suite 303, Oakland CA 94607